NEWS

Winchester's State of the Town Committee filling out

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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The new State of the Town Committee will hold its first meeting on Friday, May 16. FILE PHOTO

Spring Town Meeting has wrapped up its business and some town leaders have already turned their attention to next year with the formation of the State of the Town Committee.

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The School Committee is the latest to join the working group being pulled together by the Select Board. School Committee Chair Karen Maruyama Bolognese described the committee as one aimed at providing a comprehensive financial update on the town prior to an override.

According to a memo posted on the Select Board's website, the committee's overarching goal "is to align on a comprehensive fiscal plan that can guide the town broadly across a range of areas."

The areas include a strategic roadmap for town finances, a financial model and recommended operating and capital override figure, along with several working groups.

The working groups are Town and School Operating Needs, Capital Needs and Asset Strategy, Non-levy Revenue and Structural Costs & Efficiencies and Tax Design and Fiscal Stewardship.

While the committee is looking at getting the town on the same page for the 2026 override, Select Board member Paras Bhayani, who helped conceive of the idea, said in an April meeting that he could also envision a world where a successor version of the State of the Town Committee continues post override vote, but meeting on a less frequent basis.

"There are projects we could tackle that go beyond the achievement of an override," he said during an April Select Board meeting.

Back to the School Committee

According to Bolognese, the makeup of the committee will include the entire Select Board, along with members of the Planning Board, Finance Committee, Capital Planning Committee, residents, the town manager, town comptroller, superintendent of schools and director of fina

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operations for the schools, along with two or three School Committee members.

The working groups and the main committee plan to meet on a regular basis, Bolognese said.

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School Committee member Tom Hopcroft said while he'd like to be kept in the loop and up-to-date on what is going on with the committee, he could not carve out enough time to serve. But committee members Tim Matthews, Stefanie Mnayarji and Bolognese each jumped at the chance.

Because committee member Michelle Bergstrom was not at the meeting and so as to not prolong choosing representatives, Bolognese suggested they post each State of the Town meeting as a School Committee meeting, which would allow Hopcroft and Bergstrom to attend as their time allowed and without violating meeting laws.

Bhayani, however, said he didn't think it would be a problem since three School Committee members make up a quorum, they would post the meetings as joint meetings.

He also noted they will all be public meetings.

"I don't think this process is so inflexible that if they wanted to share some thoughts in a particular area of their expertise around the schools, or participate in a conversation when they're there that day, that the group is going to say, no, it's only the official committee members who can participate in the discussion," Bhayani said.

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Next steps

Bhayani said the committee has a lot to process in the next few weeks in terms of getting solidified and up and running, but the School Committee made it easier by making its appointments.

The first meeting of the new group is scheduled for Friday, May 16, where they'll have an official kick off and discuss "agreement on approach."

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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